

REMARKS

Claims 1 and 3-17 remain pending after amendment.

Claim Amendments

By this amendment, claim 1 is amended to recite the limitation of cancelled claim 18. Claim 16 is amended to be consistent with the addition of the limitation of claim 18 into claim 1. No new matter is added by this amendment.

Applicants' Invention

By way of review, applicants' invention is directed to a process for producing a fatty acid ester from an oil or fat and an alcohol, wherein the process comprises reacting an oil or fat with an alcohol in the presence of a solid base catalyst comprising at least one component selected from the group consisting of sodium carbonate, calcium oxide, calcium hydroxide, calcium carbonate and magnesium oxide under conditions in which at least one of the oil or fat in an amount of 0.001 parts by weight or more based on 100 parts by weight of the oil or fat and the alcohol is in a supercritical state at a

temperature exceeding 270 °C. As demonstrated in the examples, the claimed invention enables particularly desirable results to be achieved in connection with the production of the fatty acid ester. Applicants' invention is also directed to a fuel or base oil comprised of the fatty acid ester produced by applicants' process. Applicants' invention is neither disclosed nor suggested by the prior art.

Withdrawn Rejections

Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the withdrawal of the prior rejection of claim 1 under 35 USC 103(a).

Allowable Subject Matter

Applicants acknowledge with thanks the indication of allowability of the subject matter of claims 3 and 4. However, in view of the above amendments and the following remarks, applicants believe that all pending claims are now allowable.

Rejection under 35 USC 112 (paragraph two)

Claims 1 and 3-17 stand rejected under 35 USC 112 (paragraph two) as not distinctly claiming the invention. This

rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

In response, claim 1 is amended to clarify the weight basis for the catalyst. In view of this amendment, the rejection is believed to be moot and should be withdrawn.

Rejection under 35 USC 102(a) or 102(e) over Sasaki

Claims 1 and 5-18 stand rejected under 35 USC 102(a)/(e) as being anticipated by Sasaki U.S. Patent No. 6,187,939. This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

In response to the rejection, applicants amend claim 1 to recite that the catalyst is present in an amount of at least 0.005 parts by weight based on the weight of the oil or fat and alcohol components. By contrast, the reference teaches that only minor amounts of catalyst (0.1 wt. % or less) should be employed. The Examiner's attention is directed to column 5, lines 1-5 of the reference. The noted amendment of claim 1 now precludes the rejected claims from being anticipated by the reference in the manner asserted by the Examiner.

The rejection is thus without basis and should be withdrawn.

The application is now believed to be in condition for allowance and an early indication of same is earnestly solicited.

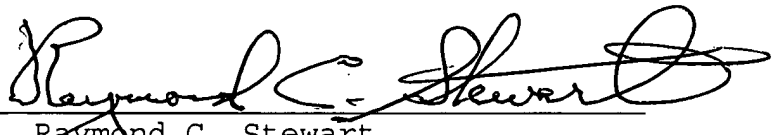
In the event that any outstanding matters remain in this application, Applicants request that the Examiner contact James W. Hellwege (Reg. No. 28,808) at (703) 205-8000 to discuss such matters.

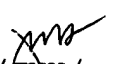
If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Very truly yours,

BIRCH, STEWART, KOLASCH & BIRCH, LLP

By


Raymond C. Stewart
Reg. No. 21,066


RCS/JWH/rem

P.O. Box 747
Falls Church, VA 22040-0747
(703) 205-8000

CLAIM AMENDMENTS WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES

The claims have been amended as follows:

Claim 18 has been cancelled

1. (Three Times Amended) A process for producing a fatty acid ester from an oil or fat and an alcohol, wherein the process comprises reacting an oil or fat with an alcohol in the presence of a solid base catalyst comprising at least one component selected from the group consisting of sodium carbonate, calcium oxide, calcium hydroxide, calcium carbonate and magnesium oxide under conditions in which at least one of the oil or fat in an amount of 0.001 parts by weight or more based on 100 parts by weight of the oil or fat and the alcohol is in a supercritical state at a temperature of 270 °C or more, said solid base catalyst being present in an amount of 0.005 parts by weight or more based on 100 parts by weight of the oil or fat.

16. (Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein said catalyst is present in an amount in the range of from 0.005 [0.001] to 6 parts by weight based on 100 parts by weight of the oil or fat.